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Corrected and Revised - 14.30 hrs.

Mrs Thatcher: Ladies and gentlemen, as you know Mr FitzGerald, Mr Spring and Mr Barry met myself and the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at Chequers today. I was very grateful to the Taoiseach for suggesting that we have the meeting in this country and Chequers was a very convenient place to have it. We have completed, I think, the fullest, frankest and most realistic bilateral meeting I have ever had with the Taoiseach. But we have not in fact come to decisions. We have had a very full and constructive discussion and we have agreed to meet again in the early months of next year to take stock of progress and to pursue our shared aim of lasting peace and stability in Northern Ireland. We can't indicate what steps may come forward then but we can assure you that we intend to pursue the aim of lasting peace and stability and also the shared aim of reconciliation with good will and determination. That was the general atmosphere and spirit of the talks. I think you will find other things mentioned in the communique and I would not wish to enlarge upon that. I will leave it to your questions.

Question: Inaudible.

Mrs Thatcher: I am not quite sure that I would put it that way. I think it indicates that it is quite easy to talk in generalities. It is much more difficult to translate those generalities into practical proposals which are acceptable both to the majority and minority of the community which will increase the security in Northern Ireland, which will establish a political framework with which both parties will be satisfied and which therefore will create the kind of situation which is likely to endure and which will help to defeat terrorism and establish a greater sense of security for all parts of the Northern Ireland community.

Brendan
O'Brien, RTE: In the communique at the end of page 3, subsection 2, I would like to ask you a kind of doublebarrelled question. Firstly, when you say the identities of both the majority and the minority should be recognised and respected do you mean equally recognised and equally respected?

/...

Mrs Thatcher: That's not what we have said. We said recognised and respected. Once you start to come to equally - one has equal respect, of course.

B. O'Brien: Well, the second part of the question is - our Foreign Minister, Mr Barry, has said publicly that he believes that the Commons speech which was made by Mr Prior and which apparently....

Mrs Thatcher: Believes that what?

B. O'Brien: He believes that within the speech in the Commons....

Mrs Thatcher: Yes, indeed, I was sitting there when he made it.

B. O'Brien: That Mr Prior had in a sense accepted that the Irish Government had a right to speak for Northern nationalists. Do you believe he is right? Is that the position?

Question: Mr. Prior had in a sense accepted that the Irish Government had a right to speak for Northern Nationalists, do you believe he is right in that?

Ms. Thatcher: I am not putting a gloss on anything that Mr. Prior has said. We have in Northern Ireland, Unionists and we have Republicans. And we have to try to find a political framework which will be acceptable to both, I am not being trapped into putting minutiae which you will then analyse and in which you will find significance which isn't there. We are trying to find a political framework which will be a stable framework and it will be acceptable to both, we are also trying to find a system of security which would be very much better for all the citizens of Northern Ireland than the one that we have now.

Question: Prime Minister, about why you need to meet again early in the New Year instead of in a year's time as we would normally expect.

Ms. Thatcher: I think this is the first time we've had this kind of discussion. Hitherto it has been very much in terms of generalities, and if I might put it this way they are easy. It is much more difficult when you say now exactly what do you mean by that, as you can see I am not being trapped into exactly what I mean by certain things because one slip of the tongue can make things more difficult and not make them easier. And we did have a full discussion and we need to have a look and to consult about further things and we shall have time to do that before we meet again.

Question: Have you got something in mind that might come to fruition within the next few months?

Ms. Thatcher: Not particularly at the moment. There are several things which we are going to explore further.

Question: Do you accept the point that the Irish Government is putting that the central problem is the alienation of the minority community in N. Ireland?

Ms. Thatcher: Well this word alienation has ^{come in} /somehow in the last year, and I am bound to say that as far as my information was concerned, one did not find alienation. One knows that a number of people are republicans, they have been republican for a very long time and therefore their views are very different from those of the Unionists. But somehow, this word alienation crept into the vocabulary which I don't think is a very good one.

Question: I am afraid, Prime Minister, a double barrell again, / on the one hand you said you are not talking about generalities, on the other hand in Sub paragraph 4 cooperation between you two Governments on matters of security should be maintained and were possible improved, could you take that a little beyond the generality

Ms. Thatcher: And it is how that in fact can be achieved, We did not want to go into detail because we have not agreed any details. When you start to go into detail then a number of things emerge which must be discussed between us. Obviously security can be improved, or should be improved in Northern Ireland. It is not exactly easy to devise a way which is acceptable to all of the people there and it must be acceptable if it is to be improved. We will be discussing more methods for improving it, and discussing with people who represent the Republican Government south of the border because if we are to improve security it can only be done with cooperation south of the border. Now, it is in their interest as well as ours, when I say ours, I mean not only the Unionists but also the Republicans in Northern Ireland, that that security be improved. I cannot go into detail and you will cross-examine me but I am afraid I cannot go further than that except to say that we are exploring it in a very constructive atmosphere.

Question: But on the simple question of whether it is generalities or not, may we take it that things like Maze escapers and extradition and so on had a part in today's discussion?

Mrs. Thatcher: Well I think if you were discussing security you would take in the things which are; policing, prisons, judicial and so on, we did not get down to very great detail today.

Question: Can we take it Prime Minister from what you have said that both
Brendan Keenan: Governments have now put their hands to the task of devising actual practical proposals which will reflect these general principles.

Mrs. Thatcher: We are seeing whether we can devise practical proposals which will lead to fundamental improvement in the situation.

Question: Could I ask you, Prime Minister if you dealt with the Northern Ireland Assembly with a view to examining ways of enticing the SDLP to take their seats in that Body.

Mrs. Thatcher: We can not impose ways from London. An improvement can only be brought about by agreement between the minority and the majority communities and we obviously will strain for that agreement, but you know, I have long taken the view that we cannot impose something from London. Any improvement has to come about by their agreement and most of us have sought that the conditions there, which are not good at all especially for the children, one would have thought that the parents in both communities would have wished for a better atmosphere and for better conditions in which their children can be brought up, and that that wish would incline those who lead them to try to come to some agreement about a better framework in which politics satisfactory to both can be pursued.

Question: Prime Minister, will the final test of acceptability of any political framework such as you talk about in Northern Ireland be a referendum of the people of Northern Ireland and did you discuss any possible changes in the South which might demand a referendum there such as changes to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution.

Mrs. Thatcher: No, that is a matter for the Taoiseach and the Government of the Republic of Ireland. We only talk in the North about a referendum in connection with a border poll/^{What}we are talking about is agreement between

the
/main majority and minority political parties, that is the SDLP and
the Unionists. (sic)

Question: Prime Minister, would'nt/have been better (I am over on your right) if/had copped one of your characteristic snooks at terrorism and declined Dr. FitzGerald's invitation to come here and gone ahead and gone to Dublin, wouldn't that have been more reassuring all round, and more in character with yourself?

Ms. Thatcher: No Sir! I was very very pleased when Dr. FitzGerald suggested that he came here. It was very very much more convenient and as I say we had a very full and frank and realistic discussion. So I don't think your idea would have been better at all.

Question: Prime Minister, given that Dr. FitzGerald has been under some pressure to establish that he has got a proper positive response from you after the Forum Report, do you fear that he may now be facing criticism in Dublin that he has not got very far today in this Summit Meeting?

Ms. Thatcher: I see absolutely no reason whatsoever why he should face any criticism. I have made it perfectly clear that we had the fullest frankest and most realistic discussion that we have ever had and it does not seem to me that that is a cause for criticism.

Question: Is there some expectation that he would return to Dublin tonight with more positive response from you on that matter in response to the Forum and that has not been achieved.

Ms. Thatcher: That expectation was never realistic. Never. And I think it is quite wrong to raise expectation and then ask that kind of question at this kind of press conference.

Question: In the Sub section when you two talk/about the identities the majorities and minorities must be recognised, respected and reflected in the structures and processes, is there at base an assumption on the fundamental notion that those identities particularly of the minority are not now being fully recognised and respected, and not now being fully reflected in the structures and processes.

Mrs. Thatcher: Well the fact is that the minority don't think that they are and therefore we try in fact again to get a framework which is satisfactory both to the majority and the minority. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, he is not getting a look in.

Question: Can we take it Prime Minister and Secretary of State that when we you do meet again in the New Year there will be serious and hard political proposals to discuss and not as you put it an exchange of EEC generalities, there wouldn't seem to be any point in meeting again if you are just going to agrée on the generalities that you have agreed upon this time.

Mrs. Thatcher: We are going to explore and see whether any proposals can be brought forward and obviously one hopes that when we have discussed these things further and in more detail there will be practical proposals to be brought forward, that will lead to greater stability in Northern Ireland as a whole. I have made it clear that none of us can in fact predict whether there will be and hope there will be so I don't wish to raise expectations that everything will be solved next time I don't think it will be but I hope that we shall get a little further.

Douglas Hurd: And meanwhile of course, we hope that there will be proper discussions again between the Party leaders and representatives of the Parties in the North because as the Prime Minister said at the end of the day no number of Summit meetings at Chequers or in Dublin are going to provide the right way in which the political leaders in the North can work together. At the moment there is something of a hiatus, because the Assembly Report Committee has produced an interim report but it hasn't really got down to the serious business for which it was created, namely, to produce ideas which could command widespread acceptance and that's partly because the SDLP has not joined in and I hope very much that now in one way or another and it is for them to settle which way, in one way or another, these kind of discussions will progress because that will make the Prime Minister's job and the Taoiseach's job very much easier.

Mrs. Thatcher: But they won't progress without them, will they?

Douglas Hurd: No, it won't progress unless the SDLP take part.

Question: So Prime Minister we have been watching this for quite a while, we wondered if there was anything acceptable to both sides in Northern

Ireland. Is it coming to a point now where it is a question of political courage on your part and on the Irish Prime Minister's part to put forward some proposals and try to implement them.

Mrs. Thatcher: Many proposals have been put forward. After all there were a number of proposals when Humphrey Atkins, was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and as you know he got everyone together in a Conference which lasted for months. Then Jim Prior put forward legislation and we tried to put his proposals into action so there has been no shortage of proposals. The question is now, whether the minority and majority parties will agree. Without that we cannot impose from London. We are very conscious that if we did it would not work. Our task is to try to persuade them to agree and to try to get discussions going with them and hope that with the passage of time they will see the purpose and the advantage of agreeing, not only a political framework, but that that would then make it easier to ^{get} greater security cooperation which I think is earnestly needed by all ^{of} those who live in Northern Ireland.

Question: Your communique laid emphasis on cross border security between the two Governments. Can I ask you in relation, first of all to the Glenholmes affair recently. Are you happy with the way Irish Government handled that, and secondly, briefly, are you generally happy with the ^{way the} Irish Government is handling cross border security?

Mrs. Thatcher: We did not discuss that particular matter. I would like to make it clear and indeed I think the communique makes it clear that any attempt to promote political objectives by means of violence or the threat of violence must be rejected as must those who adopt or support such methods. The Taoiseach is just as much against violence for political ^{ends} as we are and he gives us every cooperation that he possibly can.

Question: Prime Minister, how serious do you feel the situation in Northern Ireland is ^{right} now and given that you have many difficulties on your hands, ^{the} miners strike, unemployment, where does it rank on your agenda?

Mrs. Thatcher: I am afraid we have had to live with the difficult situation in Northern Ireland for quite a time, indeed, If you look back over

over British politics you will find that Irish matters are not new and have been very much to the forefront in parliamentary affairs for generations, indeed for centuries. So there is nothing new about that. The difficulty is, and remains, to get agreement between the minority and the majority community in Northern Ireland. That was the difficulty, it still remains the difficulty and until and unless we can, it will continue to give us many problems in Northern Ireland. We hope that when we get agreement that gradually the problems will be reduced. But it has needed years and years of patience and a knowledge that we cannot impose something from here. They will have to agree for themselves but I hope that as it drags on, really with dreadful conditions for their families to be brought up in, that they would come together and agree. We can only try once again and Secretary of State will be getting the Parties together to make yet another try and we hope it succeeds.

Question:

Prime Minister, you say you cannot impose any sort of solution on Northern Ireland and it could be argued that you have recently imposed a change in the life style on many people in Hong Kong some of whom lived in Hong Kong ^{island} / which was not part of the the Treaty land by the Chinese o don't you think a case could be made that you are actually pushing people as you did in the case of the Chinese.

Mrs. Thatcher:

The two cases are totally different. As you will fully appreciate and there is just no parallel between them. Irish matters have been prominent in the United Kingdom Parliament for many many years.

The majority of people in Northern Ireland wish to remain part of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom the majority want it to stay that way and there is a minority that holds different views and there are terrorists who are making it more and more difficult, and we want increased security and we want a political framework which will give us stability in Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. That is what we are striving to achieve. I can't pull lots of proposals out of a hat like rabbits, nor can anyone. And I am just very conscious that as an English Prime Minister we have to try to get the two parts of the Irish community together. If we try to impose we should not succeed, that the

point, you see, we can't impose, with it we should no more succeed than we have in the past, what we want is agreement between them and that I think is the only way to try to get improvement. Imposition won't do it.

Douglas Hurd:

There has been, of course, some improvement in the last few months, very faint, but there has been some movement in as much as the SDLP the Catholic minority, in the Forum Report made it clear that they were only thinking in terms of consent and equally the Unionists perhaps in reply have in various documents shown a bit more understanding of the anxieties of the minority than they have in the past. Now there is a long way to go, there has been a bit of movement and I think it is very important that the elected leaders of both communities should explore the movement which the other community has made to see if there is anything in it and that is the process that I am very anxious to get going.

Question:

Prime Minister, two questions here on security if I may. Do you feel that by the time the talks resume early next year that you will be able to go to Dublin, that security for you would be such that you feel that you would be guaranteed security and secondly, in the communique which says cooperation between the two Governments in matters of security should be maintained where possible, improved, does that include security in Great Britain as well?

Mrs. Thatcher:

Well we do have international cooperation on terrorist matters as you know. There was a communique on that at the Brighton Summit and you will be able to refer to that. And I go to Dublin, of course for the European Economic Community Summit towards the end of this year.

Question:

Prime Minister, speaking a moment ago pushing earlier/at the United States Airforce, demanded of Shortt Brothers before they were given a very very major contract that they assure that Catholics would be in the workforce in great numbers and that the Airforce would follow up on this to make sure. Would the British Government ever use that sort of affirmative action?

Mrs. Thatcher:

Well we were very glad to have that order. But of course in order to carry out the order efficiently we have to have the skilled people

1. Thatcher. Secretary of State would you like to add to that?

Douglas Hurd: I went to Shortts the other day and if you go to the apprentices workshop in Shortts, they are just increasing the number of apprentices after a time when they cut back and if you go there you will find a very healthy proportion of Catholic apprentices. These are the skilled engineers of the future and that of course will work its way up through the workforce but it takes time and Shortts realise^{that} they see the need and this is their own decision to show meanwhile that they are keen to do what you show, what you say, and therefore they are proposing, they are proposing to set up a facility on part of the De Loren site in West Belfast, which will do some of the jobs which they are now contracting out to English sub-contractors, and that they hope will enable them to employ straight away quite a substantial number of Catholics living in west Belfast. So they are very conscious of the problem and have taken their own decisions to meet it.

Question: Yes but Minister you say they have taken their own decision, they wouldn't have got the contract if they didn't.

Douglas Hurd: Well of course when they take their own decisions they weigh up their whole position. But I mean it is their own decision, it is not something imposed upon them by a customer.

Question: Prime Minister, Irish does it the question of neutrality/play a part in your discussions with the Irish, is that possibly an obstacle in Anglo-Irish understanding?

Ms. Thatcher: Ireland is neutral and that is a fact and we are very much aware of it. But Ireland is proud of her neutrality and it is a matter for her. We are just very much aware and we have talked in the EEC, but it is one of the things of course which means that you cannot use the EEC for defence discussions because the interests of the members of the EEC are different, So when we talk defence we have to go to NATO and there is some discussion now in Western European Union but the interests of the members of the European Economic Community are different. Ireland is neutral, France is not fully militarily integrated into NATO. So we have this very different interest.

Chairman: We are starting to go around a second time, we will take a few more.

Question: One very quick one to clarify, Prime Minister. Are you saying that it is hoped to get a meeting together of all the Northern Ireland Constitutional Parties irrespective of whether the SDLP agrees to go back into the Assembly or not?

Mrs. Thatcher: No. Secretary of State would you like to deal with this one?

Douglas Hurd: I am not convinced myself that trying to get everyone around a table is the right way to start, that approach has been tried in the past. It hasn't always worked very well. I think first of all you have to try and get people together and make sure they are talking about the same thing and then perhaps we could inject, could help with some ideas and some suggestions on procedure or substance but I think the first thing is to try and get the elected leaders themselves to talk together, rather than to summon some kind of well advertised conference under my Chairmanship.

Question: Prime Minister, the repeated emphasis that you and Mr. Hurd have both put on talks between the Northern Ireland Parties with the British Government, does one understand that Dr. FitzGerald is going to encourage the SDLP to take part in such talks?

Mrs. Thatcher: He is very much aware that we cannot get any further with a political framework unless that political framework is acceptable both to the majority and the minority communities, not only acceptable to the majority but to the minority, not only acceptable to the minority but to the majority. The words trip easily off the tongue. The process is much more difficult. But we have to try. And we are aware of the need to try again and if we don't succeed then many hopes will fall. But we will try, the last 10 years since, when Humphrey Akins got them all together around a table for a very long time and they went on quite well and then he tried to translate the general feelings into particular proposals and that was not easy. It is quite a long time since then, Jim Prior tried his solution and either you just give up trying or you try again. And we decided to try again, I don't know how successful we will be, we just hope that we shall because I think if you want enduring stability



Mrs. Thatcher: I heard no such suggestion, I have only heard of it from the Press, I know of no such suggestion. I know of no such suggestion.

Question: Prime Minister, if one can say that in this circle/East/West Meeting it seems that no

Mrs. Thatcher: East West circle what?

Question: In this East West Meeting, one falls into these things I am afraid, but this London/Dublin meeting seems to have been mostly about an internal set of discussions within the North. What I am wondering about was there much discussion of even a consultative role for Dublin within the current structure in the North. There was talk of perhaps a Dublin official sitting with Mr. Hurd and giving advice and suggesting that the minority population might be best heard through such an official. Is this under consideration, is this something that is being looked into?

Mrs. Thatcher: You are asking for details, I cannot give you details, save to say many many things were discussed and matters have to be explored further. The critical thing is that anything within a political framework must be acceptable to majority and minority which is why I know we have to get together with them and start from there. But I don't want to go into discussion of details because I don't think it would help at the moment.

Question: What role has Dr. FitzGerald and his Government in the suggestion that the stability of Northern Ireland and the agreement of the minority and majority are important, I mean what can this Government and the Taoiseach do to help towards that process?

Mrs. Thatcher: Well obviously, I believe that the Taoiseach and I both say that a lot depends upon agreement between the minority and the majority I believe that the Taoiseach can urge the minority to come to the meetings and to try to agree.

Question: Prime Minister, once again you stressed the importance of consent within Northern Ireland and the ^{need} to achieve a common agreement for any future propositions in Government. Nevertheless, some people might be saying tonight that Unionists will be congratulating you on giving nothing away to the Dublin Government. Do you think this Summit has any important message for them?

Mrs. Thatcher: I think the Summit has an important message for all the people of Northern Ireland. If we want a political framework which will endure. That cannot be achieved without their agreement and without their cooperation. If we had such a political framework it would make very much easier, great improvements in security which I think all people in Northern Ireland need. And the Taoiseach and I are absolutely at one in totally and utterly condemning violence as a means of pursuing political objectives. That means we are all working for a stable and enduring situation in Northern Ireland and that has to be satisfying to both communities. I am very much aware that I am repeating this again, ^{and again} you do have to repeat these things again and again because they are true. Nevertheless, when you come and get some of the personalities and sit down and talk, well shall I just say that it requires a great deal of patience and persistence, ^{and} Douglas has both. Haven't you Douglas!

Douglas Hurd: Yes, Prime Minister.

Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen.

ENDS.